

former Ambassador to the United States and First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and one of the major challengers to Lukashenko, from running in the presidential election;

Whereas, on May 6, 2020, popular blogger Syarhey Tsikhanouski was arrested and jailed for 15 days prior to a rally he had planned for May 9, 2020, to challenge the decision by Lukashenko to hold a Victory Day military parade despite the coronavirus pandemic;

Whereas, between May 6 and June 16, 2020, courts in Belarus convicted 97 individuals as part of a new wave of political persecution for “illegal protesting” and sentenced those individuals to various terms of detention for a total of 1,246 days, while 105 individuals were fined a total of 90,000 rubles, approximately 40,000 United States dollars;

Whereas, on May 15, 2020, the Central Election Commission rejected the registration documents submitted by Tsikhanouski for his candidacy for the presidential election;

Whereas, on May 19, 2020, the Central Election Commission rejected the candidacy of opposition politician Mikalay Statkevich, who previously challenged Lukashenko in 2010 and was incarcerated for 4 years and 8 months for protesting the disputed election, allegedly on the basis of his “criminal record”;

Whereas Statkevich was subsequently sentenced on June 1, 2020, to 15 days in jail for taking part in an “unauthorized” opposition event in Minsk to collect signatures for his candidacy, was sentenced to another 15 days on June 15, 2020, and still remains incarcerated as of July 27, 2020;

Whereas, on May 22, 2020, Human Rights Watch reported that between May 6 and 13, 2020, authorities in Belarus “arbitrarily arrested over 120 peaceful protesters, opposition bloggers, journalists, and other critics of the government in 17 cities,” including Youth Block movement activists concerned about human rights and rule of law in Belarus, which “is particularly disturbing in light of the COVID-19 pandemic”;

Whereas, on May 29, 2020, Tsikhanouski was arrested again in Hrodna while collecting signatures for the presidential candidacy of his spouse, Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who is running in his stead, and Tsikhanouski was subsequently charged with “the organization and preparation of actions that severely violated public order”;

Whereas, on May 31, 2020, Belarusian human rights group Viasna (Spring) reported that 50 opposition activists were arrested by police while they were gathering signatures to allow opponents to participate in the presidential election;

Whereas, on June 8, 2020, Pavel Sevyarynets, co-chairman of the opposition Belarusian Christian Democratic Party, was sentenced to 15 days in jail for supporting independent presidential candidates in rallies in Minsk on June 7, 2020, and subsequently, on July 8, 2020, was sentenced to a fifth consecutive 15-day jail term;

Whereas, on June 18, 2020, authorities arrested potential presidential challenger Viktor Babaryka and his son, Eduard, who heads his presidential campaign;

Whereas, on June 19, 2020, the European Union issued a statement calling on the Government of Belarus to immediately release Babaryka and his son and called for an impartial investigation into the arrests;

Whereas, according to the Belarusian Association of Journalists, on June 19, 2020, police officers detained at least 14 journalists, including Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) reporter Alyaksandra Dynko and cameraperson Andrey Rabchuk, who were covering protests against the efforts of

Lukashenko to undermine the electoral process;

Whereas, on June 19, 2020, the United States Embassy in Minsk urged the Government of Belarus to “uphold its international commitments to respect fundamental freedoms”;

Whereas, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, over 3 days starting on June 25, 2020, authorities arrested several bloggers, including Ihor Losik, Serhei Petrukhin, Aleksandr Kabanau, Volodimir Neronski, Aleksandr Andreyev, Volodimir Tsiganovich, and Serhei Sparish, a move Amnesty International said represents “a full-scale purge of dissenting voices”;

Whereas, on June 24, 2020, Representative Alcee L. Hastings, Chairman of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (commonly known as the “Helsinki Commission”), released a statement noting that Belarusian authorities have made it impossible to hold free and fair elections by “arresting and intimidating presidential candidates, journalists, and activists in the early stages of campaigning,” and moreover, that “[t]here can be no free choice when the system is rigged in favor of the incumbent,” and called upon Lukashenko to “order the release of those who have been detained for political reasons and allow real political competition in Belarus”;

Whereas, on June 29, 2020, Amnesty International issued a statement condemning that “[t]here is no safe environment for political debate in Belarus, and there is a growing crackdown on human rights in the context of the forthcoming election,” and moreover, “[o]pposition candidates along with their supporters are smeared, targeted and incarcerated under trumped-up charges, with women particularly targeted”;

Whereas, on July 3, 2020, in a statement commemorating the Independence Day of Belarus, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo urged the “government of Belarus to do everything in its power to ensure the upcoming elections are free and fair,” including “the right of a diverse range of candidates to participate in the campaign, the right of citizens to assemble peacefully and speak freely, and open and fair ballot counting”;

Whereas, on July 14, 2020, the Central Election Commission ultimately approved only 5 candidates to run in the presidential election, namely, Lukashenko, Andrey Dzmitryyev, Hanna Kanapatskaya, Syarhey Cherachan, and Tsikhanouskaya;

Whereas, on July 14, 2020, during protests over the unjustified disqualification of several presidential candidates, authorities used unnecessary and excessive force to detain at least 220 individuals across the country;

Whereas, on July 14, 2020, authorities detained at least 17 journalists covering protests in Minsk, Brest, and Homel, including Katsiaryna Andreeva (and Ihor Ilyash when he sought her release) with Poland-registered broadcaster Belsat TV, Danil Palyanski with independent news website Pershiy Region, Artsiom Liava with independent news website Novy Chas, Aliaksei Sudnikau and Usevalad Zarubin with independent news website Tut.by, blogger Anatoly Chilik, Andy Smythe with BBC, Mikhail Ilyin and Artsiom Mayorau with Polish broadcaster Euroradio, and Ales Piletski and Andrey Rabchuk with RFE/RL;

Whereas, on July 15, 2020, at least 2,000 people lined up to file complaints with the Central Election Commission for denying the candidacy registrations of Babaryka and Tsapkalov, and authorities detained another 16 people, including RFE/RL correspondent Anton Trofimovich and BelaPAN correspondent Violeta Savchyts;

Whereas, on July 15, 2020, Amnesty International issued a statement in response to

the arrest of protesters in Minsk on July 14, 2020, stating that “[a]nyone detained simply for peacefully protesting in Minsk, or other cities, is a prisoner of conscience, and must be immediately and unconditionally released”; and

Whereas, on July 22, 2020, the Central Election Commission announced it will severely limit the number of observers during early voting and on election day: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) condemns the politically motivated arrest and imprisonment of opposition candidates in Belarus, including Syarhey Tsikhanouski, Viktor Babaryka, and Mikalay Statkevich, and calls for their immediate release and ability to compete in the August 9, 2020, presidential election in Belarus;

(2) condemns the arbitrary disqualification by the Central Election Commission of Belarus of the majority of the potential candidates for the August 9, 2020, presidential election;

(3) condemns the crackdown on and arbitrary arrests of peaceful protesters, opposition party members, human rights activists, and independent media by authorities in Belarus;

(4) stands in solidarity with the people of Belarus, including human rights defenders, bloggers, and journalists, who are exercising their right to freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, and rule of law; and

(5) calls on Belarus to hold free, fair, and inclusive presidential elections on August 9, 2020, that meet international standards and include credible international election monitoring.

AMENDMENTS SUBMITTED AND PROPOSED

SA 2498. Mr. McCONNELL (for Mr. PETERS) proposed an amendment to the bill S. 881, to improve understanding and forecasting of space weather events, and for other purposes.

TEXT OF AMENDMENTS

SA 2498. Mr. McCONNELL (for Mr. PETERS) proposed an amendment to the bill S. 881, to improve understanding and forecasting of space weather events, and for other purposes; as follows:

Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the following:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Promoting Research and Observations of Space Weather to Improve the Forecasting of Tomorrow Act” or the “PROSWIFT Act”.

SEC. 2. SPACE WEATHER.

(a) **POLICY.**—It shall be the policy of the United States to prepare and protect against the social and economic impacts of space weather phenomena by supporting actions to improve space weather forecasts and predictions including: sustaining and enhancing critical observations, identifying research needs and promoting opportunities for research-to-operations and operations-to-research collaborations both within and outside of the Federal Government, advancing space weather models, engaging with all sectors of the space weather community, including academia, the commercial sector, and international partners, and understanding the needs of space weather end users.

(b) **AMENDMENT TO TITLE 51, UNITED STATES CODE.**—Subtitle VI of title 51, United States Code, is amended by adding after chapter 605 the following: